DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 037 510 UD 009 752

AUTHOR Thompson, Kathy Seric
TITLE Change in Racial Attitudes of Preschool Children Through an Experimental Reading Program.
PUB DATE 18 Jun 69
NOTE 5p.; Paper presented at Western Psychological Association meeting, Vancouver, B.C., Canada, June 18, 1969

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Attitude Tests, *Caucasian Students, Classroom Environment, Experimental Programs, *Middle Class, Negro Role, Preschool Children, *Preschool Learning, Race Relations, *Racial Attitudes, Reading Programs, *Story Reading
IDENTIFIERS PRAM, Preschool Racial Attitude Measure

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to modify negative racial evaluations in preschool white middle-class children through an experimental reading program consisting of storybooks presenting black figures in a favorable light. The sample consisted of 39 white middle-class children divided into control and experimental groups, and the materials were the Preschool Racial Attitude Measure (PRAM) and a series of storybooks. A significant reversal from a low to high percentage in positive adjectives associated with black figures was indicated in the experimental group's post-testing. This finding suggests that counter-attitudinal learning can take place in natural settings, i.e., in the classroom, through exposure to such story reading. [Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document.] (KG)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

ED037510

Change in Racial Attitudes of Preschool Children Through an Experimental Reading Program*

Kathy Seric Thompson, Patricia Friedlander, and Stuart Oskamp
Claremont Graduate School

This study dealt with a method of modifying negative racial attitudes in white preschool children.

Laboratory reinforcement training has been shown to be successful in dealing with change of racial attitudes. Williams and associates (1968 a,b), for instance, have demonstrated a decrease in the tendency to associate positive evaluative adjectives, e.g., clean, good, kind, nice, pretty, and smart to white figures and negative evaluative adjectives, e g., dirty, bad, mean, naughty, ugly and stupid to black figures. Preschool children were positively reinforced for attributing positive adjectives to black figures and/or negatively reinforced for attributing positive adjectives to white figures.

The present study, partially reported here today, was initiated to examine the fruitfulness of exploring the utilization of natural settings for attitude modification. Kenneth Clark, among others, commented some time ago (1955) that the training of young children in a more natural setting, e.g., nursery school story-reading sessions, could provide the "experiences" needed for altering prevailing unfavorable notions of the Negro.

Accordingly, the main objective of the present study was to modify negative racial evaluations in preschool through an experimental reading program comprising storybooks presenting Negro figures in a favorable light.

Methodology

Sample. The sample consisted of 39 white middle-class nursery school children ranging in age from 33 months to 63 months with a mean age of 48 months. These children, 19 males and 20 females, were randomly divided into experimental and control groups.

Materials. Materials consisted of the Preschool Racial

UD009752E

---

* Paper presented at Western Psychological Association meeting in Vancouver, B.C., Canada, June 18, 1969.

Attitude Measure (PRAM) and a series of storybooks. (1) PRAM was designed by Williams and associates (1967) to assess racial attitudes in pre-school children. A sex-role portion of the instrument serves in a control function. Only the racial attitude portion of the instrument and of the data will be discussed here today. The racial-attitude measure consists of six racial attitude test-cards, showing two figures in neutral position, e.g., standing, identical except for hair and skin color (facial features and hair texture are similar for the two figures). The six cards are accompanied by 12 evaluative stories and presented twice, each time with a different evaluative story. Card six, for instance, picturing a Caucasian and a Negro teenage girl is shown to the child with this story:

> Here are two girls. Everyone says
> that one of them is very pretty.
> Which is the pretty girl?

Response to each of the 12 stories involves the attribution of positive (e.g., smart, pretty, clean) or negative (e.g., dumb, ugly, dirty) adjectives to one of the figures. Each child's racial attitude score is the frequency of association of negative adjectives with dark-skinned figures. A high score indicates a greater tendency toward the association of the dark figure and the negative evaluation.

(2) The second set of materials consisted of a series of storybooks selected on the basis of appropriateness to the age group, quality of illustration and design, and centrality of main characters. The control group was exposed two times to a sequence of 10 books which displayed all white figures. The experimental group was exposed two times to a random sequence of 10 books displaying central favorable figures as black. Six of these 10 books were identical to six viewed by the control group prior to artistic modification. Artistic modification of the six books entailed water color and chalk alteration of the central figures in the book to appear dark in hair color and skin. To the extent possible, facial features and hair texture were also modified. Four other books viewed by the experimental group comprised published story-books displaying Negro figures.

Procedure

To establish baseline attitude scores PRAM was administered by a female Caucasian student. Subsequently, a second experimenter (a different female Caucasian student) read one or two storybooks per day for a total of 20 storybook readings. The experimental Ss were read and shown the books in which the main characters idsplayed dark hair and skin. The control group was read and exposed to similar books in which the characters were white. Identical questions were interjected throughout the stories for both groups focusing attention on the central character(s), e.g., "What is Prince Bernard giving the princess?"

In addition, the experimental group was rewarded with social praise for giving positive verbal responses to questions posed by E at the conclusion of each story. These questions associated the dark-skinned figure(s) with the six positive adjectives employed in the assessment instrument, e.g., "Barnaby was a good boy to save the Captain, wasn't he?". The purpose of this procedure was to strengthen the visual depiction of dark figure with positive adjective.

Following the reading period PRAM was re-administered to assess change in attitude scores.

Results

Several control and treatment comparisons were made with one treatment comparison proving significant.

For control purposes it was of interest to establish whether there were pre-test differences between experimental and control groups; whether there were differences in outcomes for the two different experimenters; and whether there were sex differences in pre- or post-responses. In all three cases, the control comparisons were negative. The experimental and control groups were initially similar in pre-test scores, there were no sex differences in responses for the children, and there were no differences due to the different experimenters.

The initial post-test measurement -- post-test scores from the PRAM -- showed no significant differences between experimental and control groups. It was the feeling of the authors, however, that specific changes might have occurred which the assessment instrument was not sufficiently sensitive to detect. Recall that the assessment booklet presented dark and white figures identical in facial features and hair texture. There were indications that this similarity may have been a source of confusion. When the question "Which is the dirty one?", for example, was put to the children, some seemed genuinely confused as to whether the dark figure was intended as a dirty white figure rather than a person of the Negro race. In addition, the assessment procedure involved the method of forced choice -- the child was required to point to one of the figures as the dirty one, for example. The option of indicating that the positive or negative adjective in question applied to neither or both of the figures was not available.

These points led to the suspicion that specific significant changes may have gone undetected because of differences between the assessment procedure and the treatment goal. To examine this possibility another post-test procedure was adopted.

The experimental Ss alone took part in the additional post-test measurement. From one to two weeks following the post-test instrument assessment, each experimental S was

re-tested in a procedure utilizing the 6 positive evaluative adjectives used during the treatment-reading period. The S was shown both control and experimental books of the same story and asked to evaluate the figures on the basis of the six positive adjectives which were emphasized at the conclusions of the storybook readings. The experimental Ss, for instance, had been exposed to the story Pickle Chiffon Pie with black central positive figures. Both experimental and control books were now presented and the child was asked a series of questions. Among these, the subject was asked:

> Here are two drawings of the princess. Which is the pretty drawing of the princess?

In comparing pre-test attribution of positive adjectives to this post-test attribution of positive adjectives, a significant difference at less than .025 was found (Wilcoxin Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks test). Positive adjectives originally associated with white figures were now associated with dark figures. For each S a minimum score of zero would indicate association of positive adjectives with dark figures; a maximum score of six would indicate association of positive adjectives with light figures. For the experimental group, the pre-test mean on the six positive adjectives was 4.4. The post-test mean was 1.94, a reversal of the direction of positive adjectives and color association.

Discussion

The outcomes observed in this study, taken as a whole, indicate that counter-attitudinal learning can take place in natural settings under these kinds of conditions. The changes that were recorded were situation-specific. Generalization to picture stimuli (PRAM) other than the specific training stimuli was not obtained. These results along with those of reinforcement studies (Edwards & Williams, 1968; Williams & Edwards, 1968) are consistent with the suggestion that preschool training, more intensive than mere exposure and rhetorical questioning, is necessary for any strong and generalizable effects.

Support for such a conclusion is available from other sources. Zajonc (1968), for instance, has demonstrated the effectiveness of mere exposure in decreasing the negativeness of an initially negative or "bad" stimuli. The evidence for the attitudinal effect of mere exposure, however, dealt with novel or unfamiliar stimuli. In explanation, Zajonc reasons that the presentation of a few additional exposures cannot be expected to affect the meaning of a familiar stimulus developed through many previous exposures.

Observation of the Ss in the present study suggested a training procedure, worthwhile of pursuit, which goes beyond

mere exposure. The children themselves, in the course of the reading sessions, created situations fitting the Piagetian notion of conflict learning situations. During reading sessions, for instance, a child might ask: "Why are the giants black? Are they dirty? Are they going to help the King?". Since the present investigation was not designed to manipulate or regulate the control os such questions, the experimenters adopted the procedure of replying, when necessary with a non-committal response.

It is possible that this or other types of spontaneous or induced conflict situations might very fruitfully produce the lasting and generalizable results which were the goal of the present experimental reading program technique.

References

Clark, K. B. Prejudice and Your Child. Boston; Beacon Press, 1955.

Edwards, C. D., and Williams, J. E. Generalization between evaluative words associated with racial figures in preschool children. 1968 (in press) (a)

Williams, J. E., and Edwards, C. D. An experimental modification of color concepts and racial attitudes in preschool children. 1968(in press) (b)

Williams, J. E., and Roberson, J. K. A method for assessing racial attitudes in preschool children. Educ. Psychol. Msmt., 1967, 27, 671-689.

Zajonc, R. B. Attitudinal effects of mere exposure. J. PERS. SOC. Psychol. Monogr., 1968, Vol 9,No.2,Pt.2.